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Faceless? So Were The European Resistance Leaders Against The Nazis

Bernard Fall's Reply to CIA-Man George Carver on "The Faceless Viet Cong"

By Dr. Bernard B. Fall

It can be conceded that any Communist member of the National Liberation Front in South Viet Nam is a member of the *Lao Dong*, the Vietnamese Communist Party, and that North Viet Nam, which had won the war against France in 1954, fully expected to gain control of South Viet Nam as well either by the elections slated for July 1956 or at a later date. I am, however, inclined to doubt that Hanoi's decision to intervene was prompted by any "increasing disparity between political life north and south." For it became obvious even to the blindest of optimists that, unfortunately, the political lives of both Viet Nams, far from becoming "disparate," began to resemble each other as only two extremes can, with their gradual falsification of representative processes and, finally, with their concentration camps and persecution of religious groups. The existence of a "Central Reunification Department" in Hanoi of which much is made is surely revelatory of something—until one becomes aware that West Germany, for example, has a Ministry for All-German Affairs to which, of course, East Germany and the Soviets ascribe equally sinister motives, even though it can be safely assumed that the *Ministerium für Gesamdeutsche Fragen* is more innocuous than any Hanoi committee with the same purpose.

The Repression Came First

It is likewise very much open to question that the intervention of Hanoi was first evidenced by a terror campaign directed against small South Vietnamese officials. In actual fact, Diem began to become oppressive as early as January 1956, when a concentration camp ordinance (No. 6 of January 11, 1956) gave the régime almost unchecked power to deal with the opposition—and the non-Communist opposition, least laured to clandestine operations, was hit hardest.

The decision by Diem—probably his most pregnant in terms of its future consequences—to abolish elected village government in June 1956 did the rest. The hated appointees became a prime target for local resentment and by March 1958 over 400 had been murdered by guerrillas who indeed, as Carver points out, "harped on local issues and avoided preaching Marxist doctrine." When it is remembered that there were enough "local issues" around to cause the South Vietnamese Army itself to try at least three times to murder Diem, it becomes understandable why South Viet Nam appeared to Hanoi ripe for plucking. In other words, there can be no doubt but that Hanoi, or even South Vietnamese stay-behind Communist elements, took advantage of Saigon's glaring weaknesses after 1959. But the Communists can hardly be held responsible for the incredible stupidity of the Diem régime and the somewhat surprising blindness to its faults of its American advisers.

The next point which requires clarification is not whether insurgency in South Viet Nam is abetted, directed and aided from North Viet Nam (it is to a large extent), but whether such outside controls preclude the existence of *real* objectives which are specifically those of the insurgents rather than of their external sponsors. Here, the recent British revelations as to the truly enormous extent of the control of the French Resistance in France by the Special Operations Executive (S.O.E.)—the 1940-1946 British equivalent of the Central Intelligence Agency—shows what is meant. According to the now-published official history of S.O.E. in France, "till 1944 the British had a virtual monopoly over all of de Gaulle's means of communications with France," and the French "could not introduce a single agent or a single store" without Allied permission and help, and "anything [they] planned with marked political implications was liable to be vetoed by any of the three major Western allies." Yet, having substantiated exactly what both the Vichy French and the Nazis

Without disclosing the fact that George A. Carver, Jr., is a CIA man, *Foreign Affairs Quarterly* last April published his article, "The Faceless Viet Cong." In its new Fall issue, it published a reply by Dr. Bernard B. Fall, author of *The Two Vietnams*. We give the gist of it here because we believe the issues are of urgent relevance to any negotiated settlement of the war.

had said all along, i.e. that the French Resistance was nothing but an "Anglo-Saxon conspiracy" and the resisters (this writer included) nothing but foreign agents, the official history makes the key point: "All these victories by and through resistance forces in France had a common basis: overwhelming popular support."

In spite of overwhelming technical control by the Allies, de Gaulle succeeded in winning political and military loyalty among the diverse guerrilla forces in France, and even de Gaulle's own views and desires had to accommodate themselves to those developed by the internal resistance in its four-year fight, in which it bore the brunt of the struggle and suffered the bulk of the losses. The differences of view between Viet Cong leaders who have now been in the fight for six years (and some of them for twenty!) and the Hanoi theoreticians and conventional military commanders go in many cases far beyond normal internecine party struggles or mere disagreements.

It is easy to dismiss those differences as being mere camouflage (after all, some people believe that the Sino-Soviet split is nothing but a grand deception foisted on the easily-fooled West) and to believe the N.L.F. is indeed nothing but "a contrived political mechanism with no indigenous roots," as Carver avers. But in that case, the 220,000 Viet Cong who fight side-by-side with 50,000 PAVN regulars, and who over the past three years are said to have suffered almost 100,000 dead and 182,000 wounded, fight rather well for what must be a vast mass of remote-controlled and force-drafted recruits. Otherwise, desertion would be just as easy on the Viet Cong side as it is on the ARVN side.

That leaves, lastly, the argument of "facelessness": the N.L.F. leaders are men of little stature in their own society; they are unknowns. But four years ago only a few Vietnamese military men knew who General Ky was, and no one thought of him even two years ago as being of presidential timber. Aside from Yugoslavia's Marshal Tito, it takes real expertise to recall the names of European resistance leaders. In any case, N.L.F. propaganda has seen to it that its leaders should not remain anonymous: at least forty senior leaders' biographies have been published, along with their photos. Their background shows the normal social background of Vietnamese leadership in general, from medical doctors and pharmacists, to lawyers and even army officers (though the sprinkling of Montagnards and women is more typical of the likewise classic "united front" picture). And they have one remarkable common characteristic which thus far no Saigon government has been able to match: they are all from south of the seventeenth parallel.

None of the foregoing justifies Hanoi's claim that the N.L.F. should be the "sole legitimate voice of the South Vietnamese people." But nothing justifies the opposite claim either, to the effect that without Hanoi's full support, the N.L.F. would disappear into thin air like a desert mirage. There can indeed be no quarrel with Carver's statement that "the Viet Cong organization is unquestionably a major factor in the South Vietnamese political scene." In that case, however, it must be treated as what it is—a political force in South Viet Nam which cannot be simply blasted off the surface of the earth with B-52 saturation raids, or told to pack up and go into exile to North Viet Nam.